Baton Rouge, LA – The Advocate

Progress in juvenile justice touted



District Attorney, 36th Judicial District, Beauregard Parish David W. Burton speaks Tuesday December 13, 2011, after being named Annual Champion of Juvenile Justice during the Jetson Center for Youth- 2nd Annual Celebration of Change. Dr. Mary Livers is seen at right.

Progress in juvenile justice touted

Prosecutor cites more options

BY JAMES MINTON

Baker-Zachary bureau

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The district attorney for Beauregard Parish said Tuesday that Louisiana has come a long way in a short period of time to transform its juvenile justice system.

Thirty-sixth Judicial District Attorney David W. Burton, speaking at Jetson Center for Youth, said judges just eight years ago had only two choices in addressing juvenile offenders: either send them to a prison-like facility or place them on what amounted to unsupervised probation.

The state Office of Juvenile Justice presented Burton with its second Champion of Juvenile Justice award at Tuesday's program.

"The judges were often sending kids to secure-care facilities because they had no other options. It was the only way for them to get services for kids," Burton said.

In 2003, Louisiana began changing to a "therapeutic model" for juvenile services created by the state of Missouri, which emphasized community-based services, positive communications among youth, self-awareness and self-analysis among juvenile offenders, and group effort — the dependency of one person on another for the success of the group, Burton said.

Secure-care facilities — juvenile prisons — were remodeled into cottage-type settings, he said.

Jetson had about 220 juveniles locked up in 2008, but the number has been cut to about 70.

Louisiana also implemented a complete system of graduated sanctions, beginning at the street level with OJJ officers counseling wayward youths and continuing with juvenile diversion programs, community-based facilities, local residential facilities and on up to secure-care facilities, Burton said.

The punitive system in the secure-care facilities was changed to one of therapy and rehabilitation.

"Some may correct me, but I believe this effort has been the most comprehensive re-evaluation and reformation of any part of the criminal justice system in the history of the state of Louisiana," Burton said.

Burton said after the program that the biggest change he saw was in the "mind-set, the change in philosophy," the realization that in dealing with children, Louisiana could continue to warehouse them or try to transform the system to better prepare juvenile offenders to live in society.

Mary L. Livers, head of the Office of Juvenile Justice, presented the award to Burton for his work on behalf of the Louisiana District Attorneys Association to move to the more therapeutic model, starting with his effort in 2001.

Livers also announced that the recidivism rate for the first year after release from OJJ custody or supervision declined from 15.3 percent in 2010 to 13.1 percent in 2011. The figures include juveniles who were in secure care, residential facilities or regular supervision.

The rate is the percentage of released juveniles who commit another crime and re-enter the juvenile or adult criminal justice system.

1) Comment by Stephen - Wednesday, December 14, 2011 Good to see somebody is working at this. Leadership in an area where other are throwing up their hands. Hard work, but they seem determined.

Baton Rouge, LA – WVLA TV

Excellence in juvenile justice recognized

Brix Fowler Reporter

Tuesday, December 13, 2011 - 3:58 pm

BATON ROUGE, LA — David Burton is the winner of the second annual Champion of Juvenile Justice Award.

He received the recognition because he's a champion of reform within the juvenile justice system. One of the reforms the Beauregard Parish District Attorney has spearheaded is the fight to keep juvenile offenders closer to home based on risk and need. He hopes these and other changes will make the greater Baton Rouge area a much safer place, "As we go forward with the area of juvenile justice reform we'll leave a better system for those who follow, for the kids entrusted to our care and for the communities that they serve."

Burton is also a member of the governor's advisory board for juvenile justice and delinquency